# UNIVERSITY RIVALRY IN HISPANIOLA

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*in partibus valde remotis et sacrarum litterarum prorsus alienis ut dictarum insularum incolae et habitantes in religione christiana magis instruerentur*

Dominican objective in Hispaniola

THE history of education in the New World reflected in its early phases the social, political, and religious unrest in 16th century Spain created by the *Reconquista,* the Inquisition, and the Reformation. Throughout this period, during the reigns of Ferdinand, Charles V, and Philip II, education in Spain, as elsewhere in Europe, maintained its medieval character. It may be recalled that during the Golden Century of the Middle Ages, the 13th century, the Church gave impetus and support to the founding of universities. These renowned centers of learning were heavily influenced and often administered by members of two contemporaneous mendicant orders: the Dominicans (1221) and Franciscans (1227). The curricula of the universities reflected the underlying reason for their foundation, namely, religious teaching. The format of the medieval curriculum remained essentially unchanged until the first quarter of the 19th century, when educational centers were compelled to fulfill the requirements of an expanding world and a rapidly advancing industrialization.

The curriculum followed a harmonious and well-structured unitarian concept with theology at the center and philosophy, natural sciences, and canon and civil law revolving around it. This emphasis on religious teaching supported one of the major objectives of the Spanish crown for its overseas territories, namely, conversion of the natives to Catholicism. This objective was reaffirmed by Pope Alexander VI in his bull of May 4, 1493 to their Most Catholic Majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella. It states in part: "We understand that in the past you have expressed a desire to search for

and discover islands and mainlands, both distant and unknown, and so far undiscovered by others, in order to bring the inhabitants and natives of said lands to the Service of Our Redemptor, and have them profess our Catholic Faith."[1]

This expressed desire of the Spanish crown for the inhabitants of the New World became official policy by royal fiat of May 3, 1509 from King Ferdinand (Queen Isabella died in 1504) to Diego Columbus, Admiral and Viceroy of the Indies, instructing him: "to make certain that in each town in the Island Hispaniola an ecclesiastical person be made responsible for teaching the Faith to the children, who should be gathered in a house adjacent to the Church."[2] It should be noted that in 1502 the Franciscans opened a school in Hispaniola to teach Catholicism to the sons of the settlers as well as the sons of Indian chiefs. Following the Franciscans, members of the Dominican Order were authorized in 1508 to found a monastery in the city of Santo Domingo in Hispaniola, and 10 years later Charles V (King Ferdinand died in 1516) commanded his House of Contracts and Finances in Seville to. . . . "provide free transportation and salary for up to six friars and students who desire to become teachers in the Monastery of Santo Domingo."[3] By these measures primary education was launched in the New World.

The initiative for promoting higher education in the New World is credited to Sebastian Ramirez de Fuenleal, bishop of Santo Domingo, and president of the Royal Tribunal. In his letter of March 1, 1530, addressed to Charles V, the bishop wrote:

> "A College could be found for teaching the Faith to the natives and the sons of the settlers. The College should have teachers competent and capable of teaching all the Sciences. Your Majesty owns two houses in this City and from the rental proceeds your Majesty could pay two clerics for instructing Indians and Negroes and still provide money to pay Bachelors to teach grammar and compensate others who will teach arts and theology.[2]

In the absence of the king, the request was granted by his wife Isabella of Portugal. It was this authorization for the founding of a college of general studies that became the matrix for the University of St. Thomas Aquinas, the first university in the New World, founded October 28, 1538.

The events that led to the founding of this university began with the appeal of the Dominicans to Pope Paul III to "found and erect a permanent general university for doctors, teachers, and scholars."[4] The Pope acceded to their request by promulgating on October 28, 1538 the bull *In*

*Apostolatus Culmine,* which stated "By virtue of our apostolic authority we erect and found in said city a university of doctors, teachers and students similar to Alcalá. The university should be governed by a regent to be known as the rector."[4]

It can be seen from the text of the bull that the Pope also granted the request of the Dominicans that their university be modelled after Alcalá de Henares, the university founded by Cardinal Ximenez in 1503, which was at the time the greatest exponent of theological exclusivism. The curriculum of Alcalá, designed by Cardinal Cisneros, was particularly suited to the Dominicans' objectives in the New World, namely, that all teaching should be subordinated to the achievement of practical theological aims. This followed in the tradition of all early European universities such as Oxford, Paris, etc., as was also the tradition in the United States, where most universities were originally divinity schools: the motto of Harvard College, for example, is *pro Christo et Ecclesia,* and on its shield is emblazoned *Veritas.*

The curriculum of the Spanish universities in 1538 consisted of four faculties: theology, canon and civil law, medicine, and liberal arts. In the University of St. Thomas Aquinas civil law was deleted from the curriculum, and medicine was barely tolerated. All subjects were taught in Latin except medicine.[5,6] It is important to indicate that the first university in the New World was originally only pontifical because the bull *In Apostolatus Culmine* was not submitted to the Royal Council of the Indies for its approval. This action was contrary to a royal fiat dated September 6, 1538, which commanded that "Bulls intended for the Indies shall not be implemented without prior approval of the Royal Council."[7]

The reasons that prompted the Dominicans to seek pontifical rather than royal sanction for their university are not clear, but friction between crown and curia may have played a major role. When Giulio de Medici ascended the Throne of St. Peter in 1523 as Pope Clement VII, he proceeded immediately to align himself with Francis I, King of France, enemy and rival of Charles V, king of Spain (as Charles I). The animosity between Charles and the Pope worsened following the sacking of Rome by imperial mercenaries, and the imprisonment of the Pope in Castle Sant' Angelo in 1527. The hatred of the Pope toward Charles and Spain remained unchanged until his death in 1534. In that year Alessandro Farnese was elected bishop of Rome, and as Paul III, the new Pope presided over the opening of the Council of Trent where the Roman Curia dominated the

proceedings and fixed an agenda completely at variance with the wishes of Charles. The strained relation between Paul III and Charles deteriorated even further when, due to the indecision of the Pope, hostilities broke out once again between France and Spain. These hostilities ended with the signing of the Truce of Nice in June 1538.[8] It was at this time that the Dominicans made their appeal to the Pope for authorization to found their university in Hispaniola.

It should be understood that with the sanction of the Pope the legitimacy of the university could not be questioned. All teaching institutions at the time required sanction by the crown, in which case they were designated as royal, or by the church, in which case they were designated as pontifical. Usually they were both. The history of the first 50 years of the University of St. Thomas Aquinas is fragmentary. The records, including the names of professors, students, and graduates from all the faculties, including that of medicine, were destroyed in January 1586 during the sacking and savage pillaging of the city of Santo Domingo by Sir Francis Drake and his pirate crew. This pirate placed all the books, documents, and letters from every religious institution in the city into a large stack and set it on fire. Places of worship were not spared. Six churches were pillaged and burnt, namely, St. Francis, Our Lady of Mercy, St. Claire, Queen of Angels, St. Anthony Abad, and Our Lady of the High Grace. In addition, the cathedral, the Church of St. Barbara, and the monastery where the university was housed were also sacked and damaged.[9]

A historical finding related to the present study was published in 1932 by Father Cipriano de Utrera.[2] This tireless investigator of the colonial history of the Dominican Republic (Hispaniola) while researching the Archives of the Indies in Seville brought to light news of a college, later a university, whose history lay buried in peaceful anonymity for almost four centuries. This college was originally named the City College of Gorjon. De Utrera's investigation established that at the time of Drake's raid there were *two* universities in the City of Santo Domingo: one pontifical, the University of St. Thomas Aquinas, the other royal, the University of St. James of the Peace and Gorjon. The history of these two universities was so closely linked by their rivalry and bitter disputes that they must be jointly described.

The history of the founding of the College of Gorjon began after the arrival in Hispaniola in 1502 of Hernando Gorjon, a native of Medina del Campo in Spain, who then proceeded to amass a large fortune growing

sugar cane.[10] Toward the end of his life Gorjon decided to found a college where "one could learn to read at no monetary cost since payment should not be required to learn the sciences necessary to maintain our saintly Catholic Faith." To this end, on March 13, 1540 Gorjon empowered Pedro Villanueva to make the necessary monetary arrangement with the king to obtain authorization for the foundation of his college. On May 31, 1540 Charles V accepted Gorjon's bequest and issued the requested authorization. To erect his college, Gorjon set aside part of his fortune in a special fund, and for the maintenance of the college he left an additional substantial sum of money in his will.

It was Gorjon's desire that the college and his estate be placed under the administration of the Secular Chapter of the Franciscan Order. However, the bishop of Santo Domingo favored the Dominicans over the Franciscans on the question of education and therefore, with their support, he attempted to gain control of Gorjon's fund and moved to block the erection of the college. Gorjon's answer to the bishop's activities was swift. By means of a codicil he placed the fund and the balance of his fortune under the administration of the Secular Council of a pre-existing City College.[12] The existence of this college was also discovered by Father de Utrera during his investigations in the Archives of the Indies in Seville. Gorjon's codicil received royal sanction on July 2, 1540, and, as a consequence, the money in the fund was utilized to improve the City College which was then renamed City College of Gorjon.

Immediate antagonism between the bishop and the Dominicans on the one hand and the Secular Council administering the college on the other broke out. The council proceeded to remove from the teaching staff of the college those members who supported the bishop's interests. The Dominicans countered with the request that moral theology and exegesis be made an integral part of the curriculum of the college; and because the members of the Secular Council were neither knowledgeable nor conversant with these subjects, it would be necessary for a clerical person officially to be appointed as a member of the staff of the college to teach the said subjects. The members of the council proved as deft in these minor intrigues as the Dominicans. Knowing full well that such investigations were routinely very long affairs, they proceeded to ask the king to investigate the need for these subjects to be taught in a city college.[11]

In 1556 Philip II succeeded Charles V to the crown of Spain, and two years later, on February 23, 1558, he issued a royal certificate elevating

the College of Gorjon to the rank of a university, which was renamed University of St. James of the Peace and Gorjon.[13, 14]

The dean of the Cathedral of Santo Domingo, Pedro Duque de Rivera, opposed the administration of the new university by secular personnel and to this effect wrote to the King complaining that "the two professorial chairs in scholastic theology and sacred scriptures are under the control of the Secular Council which is not qualified to teach these subjects, since it is not conversant in either of the two subjects and is unfamiliar with the meaning of the doctrines read during the lectures." In response to this letter, on November 23, 1561 the king instructed the bishop of Santo Domingo to visit the University of St. James of the Peace and Gorjon and place the two chairs discussed above under ecclesiastical supervision."

As "Catholic King and obedient son of the Church" Philip II accepted the directives of the Council of Trent and ordered their implementation in all Spanish dependencies on July 12, 1564. The Tridentine dispositions concerning education were not enacted into law by the King until June 22, 1592, when he directed that "Bishops and Archbishops of the Indies should establish, maintain, and preserve Seminary Colleges and be responsible for the administration." As a result of this disposition, the University of St. James of the Peace and Gorjon became a Conciliary Seminary on February 1, 1603.[2, 11]

On September 26, 1701 Philip V, the first Bourbon King of Spain, authorized priests of the Society of Jesus to found a college in Hispaniola and until they erected their own building "these religious men should utilize the Seminary College of Gorjon for this purpose."[14]

As soon as the Jesuit College, which they continued to call St. James of the Peace and Gorjon, was established (1703), the new rector claimed the right to confer university degrees but denied the same rights to the University of St. Thomas Aquinas because that university lacked either royal or pontifical sanction. In answer to these charges the Dominicans produced a copy of the bull *In Apostolatus Culmine*. However, the Jesuits quickly declared it to be false and demanded to see the original bull, which the Dominicans could not locate.[2] This bitter dispute that should have ended with the presentation by the Dominicans of their copy of the famous bull continued unabated until 1747. In that year, the King of Spain, Ferdinand VI, granted royal status to the University of St. Thomas Aquinas, and by the bull *In Super Eminenti* Pope Benedict XIV granted pontifical status to the University of St. James of the Peace and Gorjon.[15]

The latter university remained open until the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spain and its dominions as commanded by the famous royal fiat of February 27, 1767. On the morning of June 12, 1767 all the Jesuits in Hispaniola were apprehended and deported. The University of St. James of the Peace was closed and never reopened.[2]

After the above episode nothing of note occurred at the University of St. Thomas Aquinas until August 1801, when French troops occupied the Spanish part of Hispaniola and closed the university. It was reopened in 1814 but was closed once more during the Haitian occupation of 1823. Many attempts to reopen the university failed. In 1866 a Professional Institute opened in Santo Domingo where medicine, surgery, and pharmacy were taught. In 1895, by presidential decree, the Professional Institute was officially renamed the University of Santo Domingo, Continuator of the University of St. Thomas Aquinas. In January 7, 1962 president Joaquin Balaguer promulgated a law granting autonomy to the University of Santo Domingo. At present the University is known as the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo.

## ADDENDUM

The question raised by the Jesuits concerning the authenticity of the bull *In Apostolatus Culmine,* a copy of which they rejected as false, was debated for a long time. As recently as 1939 even Father Cipriano de Utrera denied the existence of the bull. This denial prompted a Dominican priest to state "in recent days a Capucin priest has once again raised the question of the Bull of Paul III denying that it ever existed. His words constitute a serious offense to the Order of Preachers by deeming members of this Order capable of falsifying such an important document as a Papal Bull." The almost blasphemous words of Father Cipriano de Utrera were followed by an outraged demand from the Historical Society of the Dominican Republic for a continuous search for the bull. In what could be seen as an example of poetic justice, the original bull was finally located in the Archives of the Vatican in 1955 by Father Vicente Beltran de Heredia of the Order of Preachers!

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